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SUBJECT: MALAYSIA'S POLITICAL CYCLES

¶1. Summary: Malaysia's established cycle of meetings and events helps define the country's political landscape and determine to an extent the pace of political developments. In this cable we outline the government's primary meeting schedule and the political events that drive Malaysia's political machine. We outline these cycles on a weekly, monthly, annual and five-year basis. We also outline Malaysia's major international engagements. End Summary.

Weekly and Monthly Meetings

Cabinet and Post Cabinet Meetings

¶2. The Prime Minister's Cabinet meetings are held every Wednesday morning. The meetings are almost always held in the administration capital of Putrajaya. In the absence of the Prime Minister, the deputy Prime Minister chairs the cabinet meeting. On Wednesday afternoons, the Cabinet Ministers hold post-Cabinet meetings with their respective Ministerial officials including Deputy Ministers and their parliamentary secretary. Traditionally if a Cabinet Minister is on long leave, his deputy does not attend the Cabinet meetings. The Cabinet generally assigns another Minister to represent the absent minister.

State Executive Council Meetings

¶3. State Executive Council meetings or State Cabinet meetings are also held every Wednesday in their respective states, mirroring the schedule at the federal level.

Party Central Working Committee or Supreme Council Meetings

¶4. Most political parties hold their Supreme Council or Central Working Committee meetings once every month. There are no fixed dates and it is generally left to the respective party's secretary-general in consultation with the party president to

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determine the dates. The monthly Supreme Council meeting of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO, the country's leading party) always attracts press coverage as major decisions affecting the country are sometime made at its meetings. The other component parties of the ruling National Front (Barisan Nasional, or BN) will only receive press coverage if a decision that would have a major impact on the party is made at the meeting. The opposition parties' supreme council meetings do not gain much coverage in the mainstream press, if at all. Nevertheless, their respective party newspapers and websites routinely report on their monthly meetings to party members and others who are interested in the opposition party activities and decisions.

"Ceramah" or Political Gatherings

15. Opposition parties do not have access to the mainstream media and therefore generally hold weekly "ceramahs" or political gatherings at the grassroots to explain the party's platform and to criticize BN policies. Among the three major opposition parties, the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) is the veteran in organizing these "ceramahs," making special outreach to rural areas. Since Malaysian laws impose strict conditions in hosting political gatherings, opposition parties have these meetings in confined locations such as assembly halls or within party premises to avoid applying for police permits.

Yearly Events

Independence Day/Malaysia Day

16. Malaysia's Independence Day celebration, August 31, is an important date on the Malaysian political calendar. In the past few years, the official celebration has rotated among the various state capitals. In 2006 it was held in Kuching, Sarawak. This year, as Malaysia will be celebrating its fiftieth anniversary of independence, it will be held in Kuala Lumpur. On the eve of the independence day, the PM traditionally delivers his state of the nation address which will be carried live on all the electronic media. The address generally focuses on the achievements of the government and the importance of national unity.

17. Another important day that the Sabah and Sarawak state governments celebrate apart from the Independence Day is Malaysia Day on September 16. It was on that day in 1963, Sabah, Sarawak, Singapore and Malaya joined to form Malaysia. Although, Singapore left the Federation in 1965, Sabah and Sarawak still celebrate September 16 as a public holiday. The Prime Minister and other national leaders attend September 16 celebrations.

Party Annual Conventions

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18. All political parties in the country are bound by the Societies Act, which stipulates that political parties must hold a general meeting every year or risk losing their registration unless the Registrar of Societies gives permission for postponement. The Peoples Justice Party (PKR or KeADILan) and Islamic opposition party PAS are scheduled to hold their conventions and party elections in May and June respectively. The Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) has scheduled its assembly in May while the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) has tentatively fixed its convention in August. Other BN parties also hold their conventions during the summer months. The last UMNO convention was held in November 2006 and the party's Supreme Council has not yet decided on the date for the 2007 assembly.

UMNO Party Elections

19. Under party rules, UMNO is required to hold party elections every 36 months. However, this time frame may be extended to a maximum of 54 months under extenuating circumstances. Although the next triennial party election originally was scheduled to be held in September 2007, in September 2006 the UMNO Supreme Council exercised the constitutional provision to extend the election for 18 months, thereby extending the time to hold elections until March 2009. The Supreme Council announced it wanted the party election to be held after the general election (a strong hint that the general election will be held long before the current government's mandate ends in May 2009) to ensure that divisions which sometimes occur during party elections would not impact the party prior to the general election.

110. UMNO's triennial elections involve three stages. The first stage consists of branch elections, and the second stage divisional elections. In divisional elections, delegates from the constituent branches in an UMNO division (UMNO divisions correspond to

parliamentary constituencies) elect 13 delegates to represent the division at the annual UMNO General Assemblies for the next three years. The third stage is the UMNO Supreme Council election where the 13 representatives from each division elect the party president, deputy president, 3 vice Presidents, and 25 Supreme Council members.

Barisan Nasional Pre-Council Meeting

¶11. The government usually holds a National Front (BN) pre-council Meeting for all BN Members of Parliament either on the first day of Parliament or a few days prior to the parliamentary session. The objective of the pre-council meeting is for BN Members of Parliament to have a dialogue session with the PM and DPM and to formulate strategies to counter opposition criticisms of government policies and decisions in Parliament. In the current session of parliament, the BN held its pre-council meeting on March 19 immediately following the King's official opening of the first session of parliament.

Parliamentary sessions

¶12. The Parliament's House of Representatives (Lower House) and the Senate each hold three sessions every year. The House of Representatives holds its first session in March when the King officially opens the parliament session for the year. For the 2007 session, the King opened Parliament on March 19 and the session is currently scheduled to end on May 10, following resolution to extend the session. The second session will begin on June 18 and end on July 10 and the final session (where the national budget is tabled) is scheduled to begin on August 27 and end on December 13.

¶13. The 70-member Senate (26 members appointed by the state legislative assemblies and 44 by the King) holds its meetings on different dates. For 2007, the first session of the Upper House will begin on May 7 and end on May 24. The second session will run July 11 thru July 24 while the last session will begin on December 3 and end on December 19. Senators serve three-year terms for a maximum of two terms. Their terms do not expire with the dissolution of Parliament.

State Legislative Assemblies

¶14. All 13 states have their own legislative assemblies, which are required to meet a minimum of two times every year to fulfill state constitutional requirements. Normally state governments hold one meeting early in the year and the second meeting in the later part of the year to pass the state budget. There are no fixed dates and it is up to the state's chief minister and executive committee to determine when to hold the meetings.

Conference of Rulers

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¶15. The Conference of Rulers (COR), or in Malay "Majlis Raja-Raja," meets three times a year to deliberate on national policies. The COR is comprised of the King and PM representing the Federal Government; the nine Malay rulers and the four "Yang Dipertua Negeri" or Governors of the states of Sabah, Sarawak, Penang and Melaka and their respective Chief Ministers. There are no fixed dates for the conference. The last COR took place in March 2007.

Chief Ministers Conference

¶16. The Chief Ministers Conference chaired by the PM is held three times a year. However, the Chief Minister of opposition-held Kelantan state is not invited to all the conferences. The conference deliberates on national and state policies. The last Chief Ministers Conference was held in March 2007.

Barisan Nasional Supreme Council Meeting

¶17. The 14-member BN supreme council meets twice a year. The last BN Supreme Council meeting was on March 12, 2007.

Political Open Houses

¶18. Senior Malaysian politicians from all political parties host annual open houses during their respective religious and cultural holidays such as Eid al-Fitri, Chinese New Year, Hindu Diwali and Christmas.

Five-Year Cycle

General Election

¶19. General Elections take place at maximum five-year intervals. According to Article 55 (3) of the Federal Constitution, "Parliament unless sooner dissolved shall continue for five years from the date of its first meeting and shall then stand dissolved." The last general election was held in March 2004 and the first session of parliament was held on May 17, 2004. The next general election is therefore due by May 17, 2009. (Comment: Former DPM and current advisor to Peoples Justice Party (KeADILan) Anwar Ibrahim remains ineligible to hold political office until April 2008. Although the Federal Court quashed Anwar's sodomy conviction in 2004, it upheld the corruption conviction, statutorily barring him from standing for public office until April 2008, five years from date of conviction. End Comment.)

¶20. According to the Federal Constitution, by-elections will be held if an elected representative passes away; is convicted of an offence and sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than one year or fined not less than two thousand ringgit; voluntarily acquires citizenship of another country; is an undischarged bankrupt; is of unsound mind; holds an office of profit; or has failed to submit the election expense report from the previous election. Since the 2004 general election, four by-elections have been held for various state assembly seats (all due to the death of the elected representative) and the latest will take place in Ijok, Selangor on April 28. However, the Constitution also provides that no by-elections will be held if a vacancy arises two years prior to the next general election. Therefore, from May 17, 2007, there will not be any more by-elections, regardless of the reason a seat may become vacant.

Five-Year Development Plan

¶21. Malaysia has followed a five-year development planning cycle since 1966. The government tabled the Ninth Malaysian Plan in September 2006, covering the period 2006-2010. GOM traditionally tables in Parliament a midterm review of the each five-year plan. In June or July 2008, GOM will present a midterm review of the Ninth Malaysian Plan. The government will present the tenth Malaysian development plan (2011 - 2015) in Parliament in 2011. Development plans traditionally focus on spurring economic growth and eradicating poverty. Consistent with previous iterations, the Ninth Malaysian Plan also prioritizes development along these "twin objectives." The Ninth Malaysia Plan re-focuses government attention on rural development (UMNO's traditional power base) especially through agricultural sector development. It also emphasizes education and stimulation of the economy.

¶22. In addition to the main development plan, Malaysia also maintains sectoral economic plans, such as the Third Industrial Master Plan and the Financial Sector Master Plan. These plans have similar reporting benchmarks to Parliament as the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

Election of the King

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¶23. Malaysia's traditional Malay rulers elect the country's constitutional monarch every five years. In practice, the position rotates among the nine Malay rulers, though the rulers do not adhere to a strict schedule of turns. The current King, His Majesty Al Wathiqu Billah Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Sultan Mahmud Al Mukatfi Billah Shah, the Sultan of Terengganu, was elected on December 13, 2006 and will serve until 2011.

Sarawak State Elections

¶24. Sarawak is the only state in Malaysia where its State Legislative Assembly is not dissolved when the general election is held. During General Elections, only the state's parliamentary seats are contested. This anomaly came about because Sarawak's state election was not synchronized with the other states in the Federation at the time Sarawak and Sabah joined the Federation in ¶1963. The last Sarawak state election was in May 2006 and the next state election shall be held by or before June 2011.

Malaysia's International Meeting Agenda

ASEAN Summit

¶25. The ASEAN Summit is held every year. Generally the standing prime minister and foreign minister represent Malaysia at the summit. The 2006 summit, which was scheduled to be held in December 2006 in Cebu, Philippines, was postponed but subsequently held in January 2007. The next summit is scheduled to be held in Singapore in November 2007.

East Asia Summit

¶26. The recently established East Asia Summit is usually held after the ASEAN summit. Malaysia hosted the first summit in 2005. The next summit will in Singapore in November 2007.

ASEAN Regional Forum

¶27. The ASEAN Regional Forum is held annually. The last ARF was held in Kuala Lumpur in July 2006 and the next meeting will be in the Philippines in August 2007. PM Abdullah and Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar are both expected to attend the Forum.

United Nations General Assembly

¶28. For the past four years, PM Abdullah has personally represented Malaysia at the September United Nations General Assembly.

APEC

¶29. The next APEC summit is scheduled for September 6 - 7, 2007 in Sydney, Australia. PM Abdullah has attended every APEC summit since he became the PM in October 2003.

OIC

¶30. Malaysia holds the Chair of OIC and will be replaced by Senegal in March 2008. Kuala Lumpur is also hosting several OIC related conferences in Kuala Lumpur in 2007.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

¶31. The last CHOGM meeting was held in Malta in 2005. The next meeting is scheduled to be held in Kampala, Uganda from November 23 - 25, 2007. PM Abdullah is expected to attend the meeting.

Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM)

¶32. PM Abdullah attended the last meeting in Helsinki, Finland in September 2006. The next ASEM summit is to be held in Beijing tentatively scheduled for October 24, 2008.

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

¶33. Malaysia relinquished its Chairmanship of NAM in September 2006 to Cuba, but remains part of the NAM triumvirate of past, current and future chairs. The next NAM summit will be held in Egypt in ¶2009.

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